

The Persecution of the Church 25

posted up than, with a bitter jibe at the Emperors, some bold, indignant Christian tore it down. He was immediately arrested, tortured, racked, and burnt at the stake. Diocletian had been right. The Christians made willing martyrs.

Soon afterwards there was an outbreak of fire at the palace. Lactantius accuses Galerius of having contrived it himself so that he might throw the odium upon the Christians, and he adds that Galerius so worked upon the fears of Diocletian that he gave leave to every official in the palace to use the rack in the hope of getting at the truth. Nothing was discovered, but fifteen days later there was another mysterious outbreak. Galerius, protesting that he would stay no longer to be burnt alive, quitted the palace at once, though it was bad weather for travelling. Then, says Lactantius, Diocletian allowed his blind terrors to get the better of him, and the persecution began in earnest. He forced his wife and daughter to recant; he purged the palace, and put to death some of his most powerful eunuchs, while the Bishop of Nicomedia was beheaded, and crowds of less distinguished victims were thrown into prison. Whether there was incendiarism or not, no one can say. Eusebius, indeed, tells us that Constantine, who was living in the palace at the time, declared years afterwards to the bishops at the Council of Nicsea that he had seen with his own eyes the lightning descend and set fire to the abode of the godless Emperor. But neither Constantine nor Eusebius was to be believed implicitly when it was a question of some supernatural